

Democratic Radio Address

Alfond says “Putting Students First” Means Strengthening Public Education, Not Undermining & Underfunding

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Good Morning. This is State Senator Justin Alfond, the Assistant Senate Democratic Leader.

Today is the first day of Autumn. Kids have been back to school for a few weeks now—and students, teachers and parents alike are just about settled in to their new schedules.

This time of year is special for our students –new hopes, new challenges, and new expectations in the classroom and at home. For many students, it’s a new start—a new opportunity.

Opportunity—It’s why we encourage and why we *value* education. As a culture, we’ve decided through the years that *public* schools provide a level playing field so that *all* kids can learn, advance, and have the opportunity to succeed—not just those who can afford to pay for school.

It seems year after year—especially during a campaign season—we hear a lot of promises about education: We must make education a priority. We must invest in education. We must put students first.

It’s true. We must make education a priority. We must invest in education. And, we must put students first. But what does any of that mean? Well, I can tell you what it *doesn’t* mean.

For the last two years, under the LePage administration, we’ve seen one policy after another undermine our public schools—the very schools in our community. Our schools continue to be underfunded—and that’s not just my opinion, that’s a fact. The state made a promise to fund education at 55% – and we are not even close. Instead, the state is funding our local public schools at 46% or the same level as 2006.

LePage and his allies continue to demand that our public schools, our teachers, do more with less. Their budget shortchanges our schools by more than \$150 million dollars. This means that local schools districts have been forced to cut programs, lay off teachers, and increase property taxes.

Additionally, the Governor has cut millions in critical investments dollars for HeadStart and other pre-K programs. How is this putting students first?

And, worse, this administration continues to push an agenda that is not supported by most Mainers. They want to divert tax payer money *away* from public schools and instead fund private, religious, and in some cases, even for-profit schools.

When are the attacks on education going to stop? Since day one, our Governor has gone on the offensive against public education.

When Governor LePage said our “teachers aren’t doing enough,” he attacked the work ethic of our teachers.

When Governor LePage said that “Maine students are looked down upon,” he not only insulted our students and our educators but he diminished the reputation of every person who lives in this state.

When Governor LePage said that the College of William and Mary had a different admissions standard for Maine students, he lied.

These are not the actions of someone who is “putting students first”. Look, it’s demoralizing. It’s counterproductive and it’s not helpful.

There was a time when Democrats and Republicans worked together to strengthen education—to truly “put students first”. This is not a phrase coined by one party or another. It’s simply common sense.

As lawmakers, it is our job to promote policies that strengthen our students’ achievement, strengthen and support our teachers and our public schools. We should always be looking at what we can improve and how we can do better.

Right now, on this Saturday, teachers across Maine are crafting lessons for the week ahead of us. They are working hard to prepare the next generation of critical thinkers, skilled workers and entrepreneurs to power our economy. Maine’s public education system is the best economic stimulator and job creation program we have. We must invest in and prioritize public education—putting students first.

It’s time to end the blaming, stop the distractions, and start working together to truly put our students first!

Thank you for listening. This is Assistant Democratic Leader, Senator Justin Alford of Portland. Have a great weekend.